CHAPTER III

PEASANT PROGRAMME OF THE CONGRESS MINISTRY
1937-39
The Congress policy towards peasantry was not a revolutionary one. It was designed to bolster well entrenched agrarian interests and did little or nothing for the weakest sections of the rural society. This attitude had been clearly amplified in the two years rule of Congress Government in the Madras Presidency.

Congress agrarian policy in the 1920s was quite equivocal; in the 1930s it moved to align Congress with the interests of tenants and small Zamindars. Although the Congress contained many of those who had been active in the earlier kisan sabhas, the general policy was in favour of landowning classes. The party believed that it was only by serving the true interests of both the tenant and landlord that it could find a solid base for freedom struggle and was pledged to stand by the one as firmly as the other in its hour of need. But by the late 1920s there were challenges to this sort of class harmony. Leftist groups in the Congress began to call for clearer lines of policy on economic and social matters. Communists and peasant leaders started pressing for more radical reforms in this sphere. The follow-up of these activities was the passing of the fundamental rights resolution in Karachi session of the Congress in 1931, regarding these matters. It advocated reform in the system of land tenure and revenue and rent and for the imposition of a graded tax on income from land above a reasonable minimum. But mild reform programmes did not satisfy left-wing aspirations. The Congress Socialist Party which met for the first time in Bombay on 21-22 October, 1934 passed a much more radical socio-economic programme. Its objectives included the elimination of princes and landlords without compensation; redistribution of land to peasants; encouragement of co-operative and collective farming by the state; and complete exemption from rents and taxes of all peasants with uneconomic holding.
These policies helped to stir Congress to greater activity. The 49th Congress Session at Lucknow in March 1936 laid particular stress on the fact that the most important and urgent problems of the country was the appalling poverty, unemployment and indebtedness of the peasantry, fundamentally due to an antiquated and repressive land tenure and revenue system, intensified by the great slump in prices of agricultural produce. It called upon the Provincial Congress Committees to frame full agrarian programme. Faizpur, in fact, revealed the difficulties of Congress agrarian policy-making. Congress could not spell out a clear policy for future reform because there had been no resolution within Congress of the important issues that such a change entailed. Should estate-holders get compensation or not? Should there be any private rights in land in the future or should all land be vested in the state? What should be the nature of agricultural production in the future peasant proprietorship? Co-operative farming or collective farming? The brochure of Congress Golden Jubilee attributed the problems of rural indebtedness mainly to the extravagant expenditure on the ceremonial occasions by the peasant population. Obviously it failed to see through the nexus between moneylender, rent and exhorbitant taxes, which in fact was the real basis of rural indebtedness.

Whatever may be the shortcomings in the Congress agrarian policy, Congress and peasant together identified in their struggle for independence, the peasant visualised himself free from problems in independent India and perceived Congress as a vehicle which carried him to the destination. For the Congress peasant support was essential to carry on its fight against imperialism. Pandit Nehru was more out-spoken in putting out agrarian problems on the forefront. He argued that the ending of all parasitical interests in land was the meeting point of nationalism and socialism. 'In swaraj, they will not be exploited' he said.

The Congress election manifesto for the 1937 elections promised to eradicate the problems of the peasant and did not go
further than the Karachi programme of six years before.

In the Madras Presidency agrarian issues offered the most attractive theme for the Congress to fight the Justice Party in the February 1937 elections. National fervour might mobilise a small section of the population temporarily, but it could not by itself sustain a prolonged and massive assault on the British Raj. The Congress therefore, needed to have a firm grasp on a large section of the population, a section at least as large as the 1937 electorate. To win their continuing loyalty and their votes it had to appeal to their interests as well as to their nationalist sentiments. Nehru, during his election campaign in the Madras Presidency declared that the fight for 'Swaraj is a fight for peasants rights', Congress leaders promised reforms in taxation and the land revenue system which would favour the less wealthy and place a moratorium on the debts of the rural population. Peasant discontent in the Presidency was considerably heightened in the post-depression period which saw commodity prices going down, seriously affecting agricultural incomes. This situation was advantageously exploited by the Congress, in its ruthless attack against the Justice Party. The Congress party meticulously planned its election propaganda, so that its political conferences were accompanied by ryot's conferences. These arrangements were probably the result of the policy adopted at the Lucknow session of placing an agrarian programme in the fore-front of Congress activities.

Most of the audience who attended Pandit Nehru's electoral meetings were the peasant population, and they came with their grievances. Even the Communists and Socialists urged the peasants to vote for the Congress in order to find a solution to their long standing agrarian problems. The sentiments of nationalism and slogans of anti-feudalism held sway over peasant population. The Congress emerged as the leading party in the Madras Assembly election and the Justice Party and People's Party were trounced in the wake of popular resentment to their
This election gave the clearest possible proof that the peasants were solidly behind the Congress. Indeed the party was distinctly made more powerful and popular among a large sections of the population. The demands of the peasants were more concrete and they felt strongly that it was the responsibility of the Congress to fulfill his aspirations. In fact when Rajaji refused to form an interim ministry in the initial stages, as the Fortnightly Report states, the average voter in the villages felt disappointed at such refusal, 'he would rather be happy if the Congress accept office and fulfill their election promises regarding reduction of land-tax etc.,'.

Finally, when the Congress Ministry assumed office in July, 1937, it worked from the promises of its agrarian policy. The Ministry drew up plans for reform legislation conscious of the need, to fulfill the great promises 'we have held out to the people' as Rajaji stated. Its approach, however, was cautious and the two important measures viz., the Agricultural Debt Relief Act and the appointment of Madras Estate Land Act Enquiry Committee (popularly known as Prakasam Committee) and its findings and recommendations made no claims to be revolutionary.

In accordance with its electoral promise, the Congress Ministry passed the Agriculturists Debt Relief Act to solve the debt problems of the ryots. According to the 1929 Report of the Central Banking Enquiry Committee, the magnitude of rural indebtedness in India was about Rs.900 crores and Rs.150 crores in Madras Presidency alone. Mr. Sathyanathan, who studied the problem of indebtedness of the Madras peasants in 1935-36, estimated that the burden of indebtedness was Rs.204 crores. It jumped to Rs.272 crores by 1939. To protect the peasant from this vicious problem the Debt Relief Act was passed on January 27, 1938. The Congress proposed to wipe out altogether all interests on the debts that the agriculturists contracted prior to October 1, 1932. Rajaji Justified this measure on the ground that it had
become indespensable to save agriculture from further decay. But this legislation was only a half-hearted measure, for it did not release the peasants from the entire burden of debt as promised during the elections. Of the total debt of Rs.204 crores, it could only abolish Rs.80 crores. The beneficiaries of this Act included absentee landlords and Zamindars while the bulk of agricultural labourers were kept out of its purview.

There was much disappointment among the peasantry and the Andhra Provincial Peasant Association appealed to the peasants to fight against this Act. They demanded total abolition of the debt, a demand which the Rajaji Ministry did not heed. But on the whole, the Agriculturists Debt Relief Act was a major legislative measure of the Ministry to initiate the Congress party's socio-economic reconstruction programmes. It stands entirely on a different plank from the previous remedies such as the Debt Conciliation Boards, Land Mortgage Banks, etc., It incorporated for the first time in the annals of debt legislation the much-needed principle of compulsion. Yet, the Act could not prevent the peasant from succumbing to the debt burden, as the Act did not provide any corresponding financial aid to the peasants. Hence the peasants were forced to go to the traditional money-lender for loans to help them tide over problems of low production due to vicissitudes of the seasons, low prices and high taxes. Consequently, the money lender had the upper hand once again in the bargain.

The other important measure made by the Ministry was the appointment of the Committee to study the status and the conditions of the tenants in the Zamindari areas. The Prakasam Committee which was formed in 1937 was the end result of long standing problems of the zamin ryots and their expression during the post-depression period, which the Congress Ministry could no longer ignore. Infact, the Zamindari peasant, for a long time was ignored by the nationalists. Even after Gandhi's entry in Indian politics this peasant did not receive the attention of the
Congress in the early 1920s. Infact Gandhi's championing the cause of the peasants of Champaran in Bihar, Jawaharlal Nehru's identification with the peasant masses in the United Provinces, Vallabhai Patel's historic Bardoli Sathyagraha, Andhra's famous Pedanandipadu 'no-tax' campaign and many such other agitations were all intended to ameliorate the grievances of the peasants. In all these agitations, however, only the peasants under the direct rule of the British government were involved. With the world-wide depression, the acute grievances of the zamindar peasant started surfacing and unrest enveloped the Zamindari tracts of the Madras Presidency. At this Juncture the socialist groups within the Congress party gained strength and considered the peasant question with serious attention.30

The zamindar ryots were the most exploited of the Indian agriculturists. Their main problems were the imposition of excessive rent, land alienation and inadequate irrigation facilities. Such was the frustration and annoyance that made one tenant to state that, 'the air we breathe, the water we drink, the sand we use, the bird that flies, etc., are all claimed by the Zamindar as his. Thus we are made to live in a world of absolute slavery. Economically we are exploited. The Zamindar does no duty here except collection, collection, collection, even our votes by zulum'.31 This explains why the Zamindari areas, though rich in material resources, were not able to meet even the basic needs of life of the agriculturists. The lack of a forward spirit on the part of the estates; the rents levied and collected proved a crushing burden to the peasants devouring even their wages. But the zamindar-ryot did not succumb to the exploitative mechanism of his over-lord. When his subsistance economy was seen threatened he started displaying his power of resistance and enterprise. The peasants started uniting to fight for fair rent and security of their tenure.32 Infact, from time immemorial peasants had exercised the trick of bowing before an unmanageable storm but sticking on firmly to their roots and continued their will to live. The impact of the ongiong freedom movement, activities of
the Socialists, Communists and Nationalists, the stories of Russian revolution had got their own effect on the peasant mind and added further impetus to the growth of self-consciousness, of dignity and self-assertion of the 

*zamin-ryot*. They were no longer prepared to serve as the howers of wook and drawers of water for their feudal over-lords and the *Andhra Patrika* in 1938 reports, that they started questioning his authority.33

The *zamin-ryot* movement, from 1930s became more sustained and intense in Madras Presidency and in Andhra in particular where it was *championed* by N.G.Ranga. Infact, he was one of the founder-organisers of the Indian peasant movement. Under his leadership the activities of the *zamin* ryots gained momentum. A large number of peasant marches and peasant weeks were organised during thirties to highlight the grievances of the peasant mass. There was also the demand for the complete abolition of the Zamindari system. The main and immediate demand of the *zamin* ryots however, was the reduction of land tax. The Andhra Peasants March, as already mentioned, generated an euphoria in the countryside. The main and urgent demands of the marchers were the reduction in rents and water-rates, remissions, repair of irrigation sources among other things.

The scale and magnitude of these agitations of the *zamin* ryots made it difficult for Congress party which formed the Ministry in 1937.40 However, within the rank and file of the party there was no unanimity with regard to the policy to be adopted. The Zamindars in the party like Dr.Subbarayan were bitterly opposed to any action in this matter. Even the Premier *Rajaji* never shared the Socialists convictions on the *zamin* ryot's issue.41 When compared to his relentless campaign in favour of prohibition and other items, he was not very enthusiastic about the cause of the *zamin* ryots. But, at the same time, he could not concede all the claims of the Zamindars for the retention of their ancient rights and privileges. Infact he was of the view that the
existing exploitative conditions in the zamin areas would harm the Zamindars themselves, if they were allowed to continue without checks. Moreover he was bound by the party mandate to seek some remedies for the tenant's grievances. This tenancy question seemed to him so complex in nature that he wanted to make a thorough study before he could venture into a legislative remedy. For this purpose, in September 1937, he set up a Joint Committee of the two Houses, selecting three from the Council and six from the Assembly, and entrusted this Committee with the work of inquiring into the agrarian conditions in the Zamindari and other proprietary areas in the Presidency. This Committee was also required to recommend legislations to solve this problem. The main terms of reference for this Committee were the Judicial interests of the ryots in relation to the landholders, collection and remission of rent, survey, record of rights (including water rights), levies from ryots in addition to rent, utilisation of local natural facilities by tenants for their domestic and agricultural purposes and maintenance of irrigation works. It can be mentioned here that the very necessity of a Committee to enquire into the problem was questioned by some members for two different reasons. Some suspected the proposed reform as a revolutionary move and pleaded that there was no necessity for any change and that the existing arrangement would be sufficient with minimum alterations, while some others thought that it would unnecessarily prolong matters and pleaded that the Zamindari institution was out of date and it should be abolished forthwith without any enquiry. Those who held these extreme views were, however, a minority and the majority of the members felt the necessity of a Committee for thorough enquiry into the problem.

A section of the legislators also pleaded that the Committee should be presided over by a man with judicial qualifications which was however opposed and the Government's resolution was finally carried out. As the terms were so vast in their scope, it took about 15 months for the Committee, officially known as Madras Estate Land Act Committee but popularly known as Prakasam
Committee, to complete its study. A questionnaire was issued to the public and about 600 memoranda were received from Zamindars, mokhasadars, Inamdars, landholders, ryots associations, Bar associations, lawyers, Congress Committees and several tenants. The Committee obtained information from the District Collectors on points raised in the second questionnaire regarding rates of rents prevailing on dry and wet land; rates of assessment prevailing in nearest ryotwari areas; the crops generally raised; the number of irrigation channels; total rent roll of the estate; rates of rent or waram paid by sub-tenants to ryots; the forest areas in the estate and whether the estate was surveyed and if so, was it a Government survey or a private survey.

During the fifteen months of its investigation, the Committee toured various parts of the Presidency to collect evidences, and examined 358 witnesses. The evidence was printed in three volumes. A Supplemental volume of evidence containing the English translation of the Telugu evidence was printed. Twenty six historical documents were also appended to the Report. In a sense, it can be said that the Prakasam Committee Report besides being a monumental work on the history of the zamindary system and Revenue Administration in the Madras Presidency, contains a mine of historical information for further research.

The responses to the queries were on expected lines. While the Zamindars maintained that they were the owners of the land, the peasants and their representatives claimed that the peasant was the owner. One of the memos also suggested that the Zamindars must be prohibited from cultivating more than fifty acres of land. The entire lot of the peasant class demanded that the right to water-supply should be inherent as appertaining to the land. Another general demand of the peasantry was the reduction of the land rent; they pleaded that the land revenue in Zamindari villages must be changed to be on par with the ryotwari villages. Many of the petitioners urged that the Zamindar and the
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tenants should have equal rights to under-ground minerals. They also demanded that a minimum of two acres of land in each village should be reserved free from rent for communal purposes. Few others urged the government to have statutory provision to enable the ryot associations and their representatives to have a voice in the administration of Zamindars. On the whole the zamin ryots enthusiastically participated in giving witness before the Committee. Their answering to the questions of the Zamindar of Mirzapuram was precise and accurate.

The Committee completed its Report by March 1938, but there was undue delay in announcing the recommendations of the Report. The final Report of the Committee was presented to the Assembly on January 30, 1939 and on the following day T. Prakasam presented the Report to the Council. It declared the peasant as the proprietor of the land and recommended the reduction of land tax to the 1802 level. This Report was accepted by five out of the nine members. But of the remaining four, three accepted all the main proposals and only the representative of the Zamindars, the Zamindar of Mirzapuram opposed all the main recommendations.

The debate on this Report lasted for seven days in the Assembly and six days in the Council. The crucial point in this debate was whether the recommendations made by the majority of the members of this Committee should be accepted by the Government for the purpose of passing a law on the subject. The Congress members accepted the Report in general, while Zamindars and their representatives in the Legislature disapproved of any legislative measure on the basis of the Committee's majority recommendations. The Zamindar of Mirzapuram criticised the Report on the ground that it was grossly unjust and inequitable to the zamindars. He strongly claimed that the Zamindar was the owner of his estate and that no alteration could be made therein unilaterally by the Government. Infact, since the beginning of the constitution of the Committee, the Zamindars were under the impression that the whole atmosphere was against them. Apart from their opposition in the Legislature and the Committee, the
Zamindars tried to undo Prakasam's Report by persuading the then Governor Lord Erskine to invoke his special powers. They also tried to influence Rajaji through the Congress High Command. According to Prakasam, the Zamindar of Mirzapuram proposed to the Committee, that its Report should be kept sealed as a confidential document because the presentation of the same to the Assembly and publication in the press would in his opinion 'bring about a revolution in the country'. This proposal was rejected by the Committee. In their attempts, the Zamindars influenced civil servants in delaying the work of the Committee. The Special Officer appointed by the Congress Ministry to scrutinise the proposals and embody them in a Bill was believed to have reported against the major recommendations. The permanent officials interposed obstacles in the way of accomplishing real progress. A contemporary nationalist weekly, Krishna Patrika, openly alleged that the officials were purposefully obstructing the legislation with regard to the betterment of zamin ryots.

T. Prakasam spoke for two days defending the Report and ended his speech with these words, 'if right is not there, if Justice is not there, reject it, and I shall not have the slightest objection'. The Government wanted to accept this majority Report, but at the same time did not want to hurt the interests of the Zamindars. Rajaji assured the Zamindars that he was not contemplating any revolutionary legislation in this regard, 'he who wants political security would not take any revolutionary action', he said. Prakasam also assured that there was 'no Moscow in the government's proposal', meaning that the Government did not contemplate nationalisation of the Zamindari lands. The Report itself did not recommend any such scheme. What the Report recommended was that if the Zamindars were unwilling to make any alteration in the original agreement as regards their ownership claims, they should accept the rate of rent that was fixed in 1802. Infact, Prakasam himself agreed that there were no new proposals in the Report and it only reiterated the suggestions, proposals and recommendations made by the Madras Government from
1802 onwards, 'we only tried to remove the injustice heaped upon the ryot', he said. But the Zamindars would give up neither their ownership rights nor the additional rent they had been collecting in violation of the original agreement.

Meanwhile, the agitation for the implementation of the Committee's recommendations was started by various kisan sabhas in the Province. The Andhra Provincial Peasant Association warned the Government that if it failed to implement the recommendation, the peace would be disturbed in the country. The Communist controlled weekly Navasakti in its editorial appealed to the zamindar ryots to organise 'zamin-ryot week' in support of the Committee's recommendations. On the other hand violent disputes between the peasants and Zamindars over the rent issue were occurring in Kalipatnam, Mukthyala, Munagala and other estates in the Andhra region. With such an atmosphere around them, both the Assembly and the Council decided by the majority to ask the Government to bring in a legislation at an early date on the basis of the majority recommendation of the Committee, but in the meantime the Congress Ministry resigned and the Report was put in cold storage.

The net effect of all the labour that the Legislature and its Committee expended for more than fifteen months was that it provided a basis for a better understanding of the problem in the estates by the legislators and this, in turn, facilitated the next Congress Ministry to abolish the Zamindari land tenure system altogether immediately after independence.

The Report, when observed closely, shows that it was biased in favour of reasonably substantial peasants, who took a leading part in organising the agitation. It also reveals the reformative nature of socio-economic programme of the Congress. The tenants who gave witness to the Committee possessed around ten to eighty acres of land. Their demands revolved around the reduction of rent and repair of irrigation facilities and nothing was heard of
sub-tenants or agricultural labourers. The question of Inamdari peasants was completely ignored in the Report. No single recommendation was made regarding the interests of the depressed classes, who form the bulk of the agricultural labouring population of this country. Exposing this lacuna of the Report, M.C. Rajah, M.L.A, criticised the Congress in these terms, 'It is true that most of the agricultural labourers have no votes to give at the elections, whereas the tenant is in a position not only to vote for, but also to canvass for as well'. The Congress had no answer to this criticism. This general neglect of the agricultural workers and other depressed classes by the Congress, despite Gandhi’s intensive campaign against untouchability and his constructive programmes, partly answers the question why the general mass of these classes followed the lead of their caste organisations without-reposing faith in the professions of upper caste leaders, to win concessions from the British government.

The Report on the whole offered no alternative to the parasitic mode of production. By the Zamindari Bill it could have only created a new land-lord class.

The terms of reference of the Committee were themselves too narrow in nature. They included neither the abolition of the Zamindari institutions and Courts of Wards nor the personal expenditure of the Zamindars, in its discussion. But its recommendations, despite defects satisfied and were supported by the agitating peasant organisations and it is not surprising considering the socio-economic base of the agitating peasantry. They clearly reflected the aspirations of the status-seeking peasants. The social composition of the Legislature too represented largely the Zamindari tenants, who were not actual cultivators, and this partly highlights why the question of the agricultural labourer was side-lined.

At this Juncture, it will be appropriate to analyse Gandhi’s perception of peasantry and the role he assigned them in the
freedom struggle. Though the focus on the Gandhian views on peasantry may not be directly relevant to this study, it becomes imperative to understand them to take any analysis of the Congress peasant policy. The economic ideology of the Congress was mainly created by Gandhi. His constructive programme was an integral part of the economic creed of the Congress. It largely accepted the Gandhian theory of ends and means and resolved to bring social Justice through only 'peaceful and legitimate' means.

The peasant occupied the central place in Gandhian philosophy. He was fully aware of the necessity to enlist the peasant mass to participate in the freedom struggle. This is apparent from his observation in 1916, "our salvation can alone come through the farmers. Neither the lawyers, nor the doctors, nor the rich landlords are going to achieve it". He repeated his observation in January, 1921, "Swaraj depends on the agriculturists. If they do not help, then swaraj cannot be attained. If they cooperate with the Government, then all your virtues will not help in winning swaraj". "Fathers of the world were struck with stark poverty", and "swaraj is a direct means of improving their conditions and enable them to clothe and free themselves" he declared. He impressed upon the peasants that swaraj was the only remedy for the redressal of their grievances," and he declared that "Swarajya is Ramrajya".

He dramatised his ideas by a constant stream of articles, speeches, and declarations and above all by his own example. Gandhi in the peasants loin-cloth and shawl, sitting at the spinning wheel, writing notes in his weekly silence, sitting lost in contemplation and lying exhausted during a fast, were all ways of getting his image across to largely illiterate population and this had an immediate appeal to the ordinary masses. The austerity of the life-style of Gandhi encouraged villagers to place trust in him. His speeches gave self-confidence to the peasantry and they became more optimistic than ever before. Congress programmes under his guidance often focussed on local grievances and provided local benefits attractive to peasants and
then used the resources to further more national objectives.

He stressed however, more on constructive programme than attacking the roots of exploitation of peasantry. His khadi, anti-malarial campaigns, harijan upliftment programme, kept peasants busy in reform activities. He did not regard the non-payment of taxes as part of the programme of civil-disobedience, and only in late 1921 was this discussed in the All India Congress Committee. He strictly instructed the peasants not to withhold taxes from the government or rent from the landlord. He maintained that attainment of swaraj was impossible unless this rule was strictly observed. Non-payment of taxes was a fatal temptation and this would lead to violence, and he reminded the peasants again and again that they were not non-cooperating with Zamindars, "we are engaged in a fight with one big Zamindar, the bureaucracy, which has made us and the Zamindar themselves serfs". Referring to the no-tax campaign in Andhra, he made a veiled threat, that they should bear the responsibility for any mishap that may occur and that they would not be blamed by anybody if they do not take up the no tax campaign movement. "On the Chirala-Perala movement he said, "if the movement succeeded, the glory would in part go to the Congress, but if it failed, the discredit of it should not attach to the Congress". When the movement was intensified and after Andhra Provincial Congress Committee favoured no-tax campaign, he preached strict maintenance of non-violence, "when the military opened on the peasants, they are expected to expose their willing breasts to the bullets and still not harbour revenge or resentment. They must let their utensils and belongings be taken away from them silently, like Draupadi or Prahlad, they are praying to God and proving their faith in Him". He announced that the God bless the Andhras. He urged volunteers to go about the villagers and take signatures of the peasantry agreeing to the peaceful agitation. Such a caution, thought was necessary in the case of the over-exuberant Andhras. In fact the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee withdrew its support to the
From the 1920s serious efforts were made in Andhra by some nationalists to organise the peasants to redress their grievances. As early as 1922 N.G.Ranga and others tried to organise the peasantry in Krishna, Godavari and Guntur districts. The Andhra peasants took the lead in creating their own association in 1928. Gandhi did not take notice of this happenings. He undertook his tour in Andhra in 1929, wholly in the interest of khadi, in connection with the constructive programme resolutions of the Congress. His 1933 visit to Andhra was in connection with the cause of harijan uplift. He took no note of the anti-resettlement movement launched by the peasants in Andhra. He was critical of the Andhra Congress that it had too many leaders totally disunited and had very few followers. He wanted them to work in coalition with the Zamindars for mutual good. While on his tour to Visakhapatnam, he acknowledged the rich contributions from Zamindars. Infact, Gandhi was fully aware that the Zamindars would prove the chief stumbling block to the non-cooperation programme and they could be brought to knees if the tenants could be induced not to pay rent. But at no time did he advice peasants to stop payment of rent. It was only to keep the Zamindar at their heels. He compared the with holding of revenues by peasants as an act of rowdyism by which they can achieve nothing.

He tried to develop a moral bond between the peasant and the Zamindar. Though he criticised the atrocities of Zamindars and their mode of levying cesses, legal and illegal, he attempted to build a model Zamindar, who would reduce rents, know their peasants and inject hope into them, establish schools, purify the village well and tank, teach the ryot to sweep his roads and clean his latrines by himself. He was highly critical of dividing India between rich and poor. He was against Congress taking a stand for the rights of the peasant irrespective of the interests
of the land-lords, because by such step, "we will only dig our and their graves if we took that stand". If peasants aim at asserting their rights, they can do so only by cooperating with Zamindars, not by harassing or killing them", he said. In the 1930s when the Andhra peasants possessed the lands of Munagala Zamindar, he vehemently criticised the Andhra Congress Committee for supporting their move. He warned that the Congress Government would dig its grave if it failed to restore the land to the legal possessor.

Gandhi did not contemplate the elimination of the princes and landlords nor did he contemplate redistribution of land to peasants. He aimed at the reformation of the princes and the landlords. He assured that peasants would secure rights which virtually amount to ownership, without a violent redistribution of land. Though he agreed that the land belongs to the tiller, he had no intentions of wiping out the Zamindar. He held that the man who supplied brains and metal was as much a tiller as the one who laboured with his hands. When the Zamindars and the peasants develop cordial relations the former need not be eliminated. He preached that peasant, if he attempted to force out Zamindar, would ruin themselves as yadavas in Mahabharatha, who were themselves annihilated when they were out to destroy others.

He did not like a separate kisan organisation for his peasant. He was of the opinion that kisan sabhas were organised only with a view to capture the Congress organisation and as a result the poor peasants were being grounded between the two mill-stones. He encouraged N.G.Ranga to start a peasant organisation only to educate and make the peasants Congress minded and politically conscious. In January 1934 he inaugurated the Rama Needu Peasant Institute in Nidubrolu to harness the peasant activity.

Throughout the freedom struggle he resisted the peasant
The constructive programme was a success politically and a failure on the social and economic fronts.\textsuperscript{126} It was successfully used by the Congress leadership for tension management. His success in Champaran and Bardoli made him the undisputed leader of the peasants or a messiah who could ameliorate the peasants' lot. But in reality he exercised a restraining influence on the revolutionary potentiality of the peasants. Was he collaborator of the exploiting classes? Gandhi was basically opposed to violent revolution. His theory was 'means must Justify the end'. He pleaded that non-violence was the only Justifiable means to eradicate evils and bring about a revolt in society. The Gandhian ideology preached class collaboration and class harmony as a cordial principle. Even those peasant movements initiated by the Congress under Gandhi's leadership were invariably restricted to seeking relief against the excessive rates of land revenue, and were in no case directed against the Zamindar.\textsuperscript{130} The Congress support to resettlement struggles in Andhra is clear example of this nature.\textsuperscript{131}

Gandhi was pleased with the Zamindars who showed patriotic zeal and appealed to the rest to follow suit.\textsuperscript{132} The Zamindars as a class, under the umbrella of nationalism, escaped the wrath of the Gandhian peasant. He tried to reconcile the irreconcilable interest to keep intact the national character of the movement.
He was successful in deepening the anti-imperialist feelings among the peasants who shed their fear to challenge the authority of the British. In his enthusiasm in seeing the country free, he did little to make the Congress speak for the peasant, though he made the peasant speak for the Congress.

Through his technique of mobilization and gospel of peace and non-violence, he became to the peasantry a symbol of opposition to the oppressor, who so ever he may be and led a specific type of controlled mass movement. It was Gandhi who for the first time, turned the attention of the Congress and national workers to the village and its kisans. His popularity rested in his peasant image which was projected by the local leaders and the press. He achieved hegemony over peasant mind by explaining that to fight two enemies i.e., colonial oppressors as well as class enemies i.e., Zamindars, at the same time was impracticable. The argument of 'class adjustment' however, in the name of nationalism given in defence of Gandhi's approach, though relevent, fails to explain the situation in totality. Thus, the Gandhian and Congress paradigm of peasantry was partly responsible for the out-break of anti-zamindari struggles in Andhra.
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10. Under Secretary (safe) Secret Files No.982, dt.10.1.1937.


15. Under Secretary (safe) Secret Files, No.982, 10.1.37.


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20. Poineer, dt.25.7.37.

21. For details see Madras legislative Council Deates, vol.4,
(MLCD), December 1937-January, 1938.


31. RMELAC, Memo-Part II, p.143.

32. Andhra Patrika, 2.8.28.

33. Ibid, 4.2.38.

34. The Andhra Provincial Peasant Association was first founded by N.G. Ranga in 1928 at Guntur.

35. C.O.Ms. No.353, Public (General) Department, dt.28.2.35.

36. RMELAC, Memoranda-Supplemental Volume, p.155.


38. Kommareddy Sathyanarayana Murthy 50th Anniversary Memorial Issue, Vijayawada, 1990, p.120.

39. RMELAC, Memoranda-Supplemental Volume, p.32.


41. Vlsalandhra, 23.2.66.

42. Navasakti, 1.2.39.


44. RMELAC, Memo-Part II, p.xi.

45. Minutes of the RMELAC, Madras, 1939, pp.17 & 18.
46. Almost all the members who participated in the discussion in the both the Houses supported the constitution of a Committee.


48. The Committee consisted of Mehboob Ali Baig, the Zamindar of Mirzapuram, M. Pallam Raju, B. Venkatachalam Pillai and P. S. Kumarswami Raja representing the Assembly and B. V. Narayanaswami Naidu, V. V. Jogalaih Naidu and A. Rangaswami Ayyangar representing the Council with T. Prakasam the Revenue Minister as its Chairman and T. Vishwanatham, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Revenue Minister as the Secretary of the Committee.

49. Questions regarding proprietorship of the soil, rent, powers of landholders in the collection of rent, rights to water-supply, survey of estates, utilization of local natural facilities etc., were raised. *RMELAC*, Memo-Part II, p. xii.


52. See Appendices to the *RMELAC*.

53. See the *RMELAC*, regarding landholders statement and memoranda submitted to the Committee.


55. Ibid, p. 119.

56. Ibid. p. 77.

57. Ibid. p. 79.


60. Andhra Kesari prakasam Centenary Celebrations Publication, 1974, p. 82.


64. Navasakti, 1.2.39.
68. Village Republic, 17.10.40.
69. Vlsalandhra, 23.2.66.
70. Village Republic, 17.10.40.
71. Dr.Pattabhi Sitaramayya, Why Vote Congress, Bombay, 1945, pp.54-55.
75. Ibid, p.11.1.38.
76. Navasakti, 7.12.38.
77. Ibid, 11.1.38.
78. Ibid, 11.1.38.
80. The Ministry resigned on August 26, 1939 in protest against the British Government's unilateral decision to involve India in the Second World War.
81. See RMELAC, Oral Evidence, Part IV.
84. Participating in the debate regarding the Report of the Madras Estate land Act Committee, T.T.Krishnamachari, M.L.A., observed "we the members of the Legislature are middle class people. We represent the Zamasidars, we represent the Zamindari tenants who are not actual cultivators, and we also represent the Kanamdars of Malabar. The major portion of the members may therefore be compendiously termed as representing the bourgeious element. We cannot escape from this position". MLAD, vol;IX. pp.587-588.
88. Hindu, 1.4.21.
89. Independent, 2.7.20.
90. Aaj, 27.11.20.
92. Sadhana, 15.11.29.
93. The response to Gandhi's Salt Sathyagraha in 1930 lay not only in his efforts and their rising political consciousness but also due to the devastating impact the economic depression of late 1920s had brought upon them.
94. Hindu, 1.4.21.
96. Young India, 9.3.21.
97. Ibid, 26.1.22.
98. Ibid, 26.1.22.
100. Young India, 2.2.22, Hindu, 23.1.22.
101. Young India, 26.1.22.
103. Hindu, 11.1.22.
105. Andhra Patrika. 2.8.28.
110. Hindu, 30.4.29.
111. F.No.75/Jan, 1921, Home Political, p.8.


117. *Hindu*, 16.8.34.


122. *Hindu*, 23.1.45.


125. *Young India*, 9.2.21.


129. *Young India*, 26.1.22.


